

# *PTSD and Adult Trauma*

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Approximately 7.7 million American adults age 18 and over, or about 3.5% of the population in this age group in a given year, have PTSD. ([www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/numbers.cfm](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/numbers.cfm))

Median age of onset is 23 years. ([www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/numbers.cfm](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/numbers.cfm))

Approximately 73% of individuals exposed to a traumatic incident will experience dissociative states during the incident or in the hours, days, and weeks following... However, for most of those people these dissociative incidents will subside on their own within a few weeks after the traumatic incident subsides.

-[www.issd.org](http://www.issd.org) (International Society for the Study of Dissociation)

#### Acute Stress Disorder, 308.3 DSM IVTR

- Experience, witness, or confront an event that threatens life or limb of self or other
- Feeling of fear, helplessness and horror
- While experiencing or after experiencing the event, the individual has 3 (or more) of the following dissociative symptoms:
  - subjective sense of numbing, detachment, or absence of emotional responsiveness
  - reduction in awareness of surrounding
  - derealization
  - depersonalization
  - dissociative amnesia
- Event is consistently reexperienced
- Marked avoidance of stimuli related to the event
- Marked symptoms of anxiety or increased arousal
- Disturbance impairs usual functioning or ability to seek assistance
- Last a minimum of 2 days and max. of 4 weeks, occurs within 4 weeks of event
- Not due to direct physiological effects of a substance

- PTSD definition:
- Experience, witness, or confront an event that threatens life or limb of self or other
  - Feeling of fear, helplessness and horror
  - Reexperiencing of symptoms, e.g. distressing dreams of event(s)
  - Avoidance/numbing symptoms, e.g. sense of foreshortened future
  - Hyperarousal symptoms, e.g. irritability or outbursts of anger
- Symptoms must continue for more than one month following the event.  
Acute: less than 3 months. Chronic: more than 3 months

## Symptoms of Trauma

Eating Disturbances

Sleep Disturbances

Sexual Dysfunction

Low energy

Chronic, unexplained pain

Depression, spontaneous crying, despair, and hopelessness

Anxiety

Panic Attacks

Fearfulness

Compulsive and Impulsive Behaviors

Irritability, angry outbursts

Emotional numbness

Withdrawal from normal routines and relationships  
Memory lapses  
Difficulty making decisions  
Concentration problems  
Increased distractibility  
Intrusive thoughts  
Flashbacks or nightmares  
Sudden flooding of emotions or images related to trauma  
Avoidance of stimuli related to trauma  
Detachment  
Guilt feelings  
Grief reactions  
Altered sense of time  
Increased arousal  
Hyper vigilance, exaggerated startle response  
Overreactions  
Obsession with death/suicidality  
Substance abuse  
Self harming behaviors  
Cognitive distortions

## Interventions:

### Cognitive/Behavioral Therapy

- Teach coping skills
- Practice self care activities
- Create/sustain environmental safety
- Eliminate self harming behaviors
- Develop and maintain supportive relationships

### Assess for medications to treat symptoms

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Mood instability
- Sleep problems

### Trauma specific interventions

- Listen to descriptions of trauma, subjective experiences of memory
- Validate emotional experiences
- Address cognitive distortions
- Normalize trauma symptoms
- Assess and refer to trauma specific services (rape crisis, domestic abuse intervention, community debriefing groups, etc.)

